# MOVING FORWARD ON EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

## AGREEMENT-IN-PRINCIPLE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

July 7, 2005

Canada

Alberta

## Introduction

Governments recognize that parents and families have the primary responsibility for supporting and nurturing children. Governments support parents in this role through a wide range of policies and programs including early learning and child care. These measures provide parents with a range of options and choices for caring for their children and balancing their family, work and community responsibilities.

Governments recognize that the early years of life are critically important for the development and future well-being of children. Research demonstrates early childhood development programs and services such as quality early learning and child care plays an important role in promoting the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children.

Governments agree to work towards a shared vision for regulated early learning and child care for young children. This agreement-in-principle reflects the Government of Canada's 2004 Throne Speech commitment to enhance early learning and child care across Canada. It builds on governments' commitments under the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care and complements the 2000 Federal-Provincial-Territorial First Ministers Communique on Early Childhood Development.

Consistent with commitments made by First Ministers under the 2000 Early Childhood Development Agreement, the Governments of Canada and Alberta will work together in full respect of each other's responsibilities, recognizing that the province has responsibility for early learning and child care. The Government of Alberta will have the flexibility to determine its priorities within this initiative.

The Government of Alberta is committed to helping all the province's children get the best possible start in life. It supports parents, families and communities right from the start—through comprehensive early childhood development including child care programs.

The goal of these programs is healthy early childhood development. Because parents and caregivers play a critical role in fostering children's development, Alberta's programs and services include supports for parents and other adults who care for children.

There is often no clear line between "early childhood development" and "child care" programs and services. The two disciplines support and enhance one another as part of a broad spectrum of services. Both emphasize early learning and development. Early childhood development programs may contain child care elements and vice versa. Such overlaps are consistent with a holistic, non-compartmentalized approach to meeting children's needs.

Alberta's approach to early learning and child care provides a broad range of high-quality programs and services. It includes "reach forward" strategies that establish links between home and communities. Alberta provides parents and families with a variety of child care choices through programs and services such as:

- Regulated child care in government-licensed daycare centres or approved family day homes;
- Child care delivered through early childhood development programs such as Head Start;

- Child care provided by parents and families or through specialized kin child care programs; and
- Supports for parents and children through Parent Link Centers.

This agreement-in-principle will enable the Government of Canada to support elements of Alberta's programs and services as set out below.

## NATIONALLY SHARED VISION

The Governments of Canada and Alberta believe young children will benefit from high quality early learning and child care that is grounded in the value and respect Canadians give to children and their families. Governments believe parental choice is a key consideration in the development of any new approaches to early childhood development including early learning and child care.

Parents who choose to use regulated early learning and child care in their communities will be confident that their children will experience high quality, inclusive, developmental programs and services that best meet the needs of their young children.

Quality early learning and child care will recognize the unique needs of every child. It will provide stimulating enriching experiences and healthy physical environments where children can develop and flourish to their full potential.

Early learning and child care reflects the value that parents and communities place on qualified and dedicated early childhood educators and child care providers.

Achieving this vision will require time, shared commitment and collaboration, as well as incremental, predictable and sustained investments over the long term.

## PRINCIPLES

The principles set out below help shape a shared vision for the future, guiding investments and decisions regarding local needs and priorities under this initiative. They are reflective of, and build on, the principles for effective approaches established under the previous *Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care (2003)*. Although each of the principles is a critical component of effective early learning and child care, they are also related and need to be considered together. The following principles will help advance the vision for early learning and child care.

### Quality

High quality early learning and child care supports optimal child development, by demonstrating evidence-based quality practices, including provincial regulation and monitoring, and an appropriate complement of staff and child care providers qualified in early learning and child care.

### Universally Inclusive

Universally inclusive early learning and child care is open and responsive, without discrimination, to young children, including children with special needs, Aboriginal children, and children with various cultural and linguistic circumstances. Diversity is respected and valued.

### Accessible

Accessible early learning and child care is broadly available to children and parents. It is also affordable to parents who choose to use it.

### Developmental

Developmental early learning and child care demonstrates quality and contributes to improved lifetime outcomes for children by supporting social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and parents' knowledge and involvement. Developmental early learning and child care is child centred, reflects family and community contexts and encourages meaningful partnerships between parents and child care providers.

## GOALS

In keeping with these principles, the Government of Alberta agrees to work over time to achieve broad long term goals. Alberta will establish its own targets.

### Quality

Improve the quality of early learning and child care by investing in evidence-based quality practices such as:

- Support developmentally appropriate programs for children;
- Develop training and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers;
- Support recruitment and retention strategies for qualified early learning and child care providers;
- Strengthen and enhance provincial regulation and monitoring of early learning and child care; and
- Promote community engagement and partnerships that create more opportunities for children to participate in quality early learning and child care.

### Universally Inclusive

Increase the responsiveness of early learning and child care to respond to the diverse needs of children by investing in evidence-based practices such as:

- Develop and strengthen programming and supports for children's cultural, linguistic and/or special needs; and
- Support the development of supports and resources for early learning educators and child care providers which recognize children's cultural, linguistic and/or special needs.

**Accessible**

Increase the availability and affordability of early learning and child care reflecting the needs of each jurisdiction such as:

- Develop innovative approaches to service provision in rural and underserved areas;
- Enable flexible approaches that address a range of family and employment circumstances;
- Enhance fee subsidies; and
- Increase early learning and child care opportunities.

**Developmental**

Strengthen the learning and developmental component of early learning and child care to meet more fully the cognitive, physical, emotional and social development needs of children by investing in evidence-based practices such as:

- Support developmentally appropriate early learning and child care for children;
- Support the development of appropriate child-centred activities;
- Support the engagement of parents in their children's early learning and child care; and
- Strengthen safe, secure, nurturing and stimulating early learning and child care environments.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives under this agreement-in-principle include improved outcomes for children and increased support to parents in their primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of their children.

Over the next five years, Alberta, subject to the availability of new federal funding will develop and enhance its regulated early learning and child care system towards achieving the following objectives:

- Measurable and demonstrable improvements in the *quality* and *developmental* components of early learning and child care programs through:
  - Strengthening safe, nurturing and stimulating environments for children;
  - Promoting community partnerships in supporting early learning and child care opportunities and identification of child care needs;
  - Developing training and supports for early childhood educators and child care providers; and
  - Promoting quality child care accreditation.

- Better *access* to early learning and child care, which is *universally inclusive*, by:
  - Increasing the availability of early learning and child care opportunities;
  - Enhancing the range of quality early learning and child care options that are available to families across the province;
  - Making early learning and child care more affordable;
  - Strengthening supports for children with special needs to be included in local community child care settings; and
  - Promoting culturally and linguistically appropriate early learning and child care opportunities for multicultural and linguistic communities, in particular for francophones.

**AREAS FOR INVESTMENT**

To advance the vision set out in this agreement, Alberta agrees to invest federal funds transferred to Alberta under this initiative in provincially regulated and approved early learning and child care programs and services, including public and private providers, for children under six.

In the context of this agreement, regulated programs are defined as programs and services that meet quality standards that are established and monitored by Alberta.

Early learning and child care programs and services funded under this agreement will primarily provide direct care for children in settings such as child care centers, family child care homes, preschools and nursery schools. Types of investments could include: capital and operating funding, fee subsidies, wage enhancements, training, professional development and support, quality assurance, and parent information and referral.

Programs and services that are part of the formal school system will not be included in this initiative.

**ALBERTA'S STRATEGIC PLAN**

Consistent with principles and goals set out above, and subject to availability of new federal funding, Alberta agrees to develop and release as part of its business planning cycle, a strategic plan on early learning and child care regarding the five years of new federal funding under this initiative.

The Strategic Plan will:

- Identify specific priorities for investment based on an assessment of progress to date in establishing quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental (QUAD) early learning and child care;
- Identify measurable targets for tracking progress in relations to the objectives of this Agreement-in-Principle;

- Identify baseline expenditures for early learning and child care and areas for incremental investment; and
- Identify and respond to the early learning and child care needs of:
  - Children with special needs;
  - Aboriginal children; and
  - Children from multicultural and linguistic communities, including francophone communities.

Alberta will continue to ensure mechanisms for consultation with Albertans to aid in the development of early learning and child care priorities.

Alberta will work with the Government of Canada and Aboriginal peoples to find practical solutions to address the early learning and child care needs of Aboriginal children in Alberta.

**ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING**

Canada and Alberta agree that the purpose of public reporting is to be accountable to their publics, not to each other.

Alberta is committed to being accountable to its citizens for the provision of early learning and child care programs and services.

Clear public reporting will enhance accountability and will allow Albertans to track progress in early learning and child care and the impact of early learning and child care on outcomes for children. It will also allow Albertans to monitor their government's progress.

Under the existing 2003 Multilateral Agreement on ELCC, the Government of Alberta releases an annual public report that includes descriptive and expenditure information on all early learning and child care programs and services, as well as broad indicators of availability, affordability and quality.

Building upon that commitment, beginning with the 2005-2006 Annual Report, to be released by November 2006, Alberta will incorporate the following specific comparable indicators in its annual report to Albertans:

- Availability: the number of regulated early learning and child care spaces by type of setting and age group, and number of children receiving special needs services, and number of centres providing services in other languages.
- Affordability: the number of families and children receiving subsidies.
- Quality: training requirements, child to staff ratios and group size in regulated programs.

Alberta may also include additional indicators, as appropriate. As the Governments of Canada and Alberta agree to other comparable indicators, Alberta will incorporate these indicators in annual reports, to the extent that data is available.

## FUNDING

Funding under this agreement-in-principle flows from the Government of Canada's commitment to invest, across the country, $5 billion over 5 years and builds on the existing significant investments made by the Government of Alberta in early learning and child care.

Canada and Alberta agree that any additional investments in early learning and child care should be incremental, predictable and sustained over the long-term.

New federal funding provided under this agreement is in addition to funds already committed under the previous Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Early learning and child care.

| | Estimated Funding under 2003 Multilateral Framework on ELCC* (CST) ($ million) | Estimated New ELCC Funding ($ million) | Estimated Total ($ million) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2005-2006 | 22.6 | 70.4 | 93.0 |
| 2006-2007 | 30.3 | 65.7 | 96.0 |
| 2007-2008 | 35.6 | 116.8 | 152.4 |
| 2008-2009 | 35.7 | 117.3 | 153.0 |
| 2009-2010 | 35.9 | 117.9 | 153.8 |

* Federal funding under the 2003 Multilateral Framework will continue to flow through the Canada Social Transfer.

The $70.4 million indicated for 2005-06 is in recognition of amounts put in trust for Alberta, which the province may draw in either 2004-05 or 2005-06. Alberta will have the flexibility to draw down funds as they require up to the end of March 31, 2006.

Exact per capita amounts are to be more fully defined in a detailed multi-year funding agreement.

Parliament of Canada approval of federal funding is required before funding is available and can be disbursed.

## KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Alberta recognizes the importance of evaluation in determining the effectiveness and outcomes of initiatives in early learning and child care and agrees to pursue evaluations, where appropriate, in order to assess the impact of investments made under this agreement.

Canada and Alberta agree to work together to share knowledge, research and information on effective practices in early learning and child care. The Government of Alberta will work over time with the Government of Canada and other interested provincial and territorial governments to collaborate to:

- Develop a National Quality Framework, which governments would hope will identify best practices in quality, developmental early learning and child care, and provide the basis for research and development of guidelines and forward-looking, evidence-based benchmarks to guide future programming.
- Adapt and finalize the Evaluation Framework initiated under the previous Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, to serve as a tool and guide to assess program effectiveness.
- Develop and implement an enhanced knowledge, information and data strategy, including data to support comparable program indicators.
- Develop additional comparable program and child outcome indicators.
- Undertake a review of this initiative, to be completed by March 31, 2009, to take stock of progress towards the realization of the nationally shared vision, consider any adjustments, and establish next steps.

A process for moving forward with these activities will be developed jointly by the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta and other interested provincial and territorial governments. With respect to each of the above activities, the Governments of Canada and Alberta will move forward in consultation with experts and other interested parties as mutually agreed.

## LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Alberta may wish to reconsider the agreement-in-principle in the event of federal legislation that substantially alters respective roles and responsibilities as they relate to early learning and child care.

## NEXT STEPS

Alberta and Canada will work together to conclude a multi-year funding agreement for the period of 2006-07 to 2009-2010 following the release of Alberta's Strategic Plan as described above.

Signed on _____ at _____

For Canada,

_____

The Honourable Ken Dryden
Minister of Social Development

For Alberta,

_____

The Honourable Heather Forsyth
Minister of Children's Services

And,

_____

The Honourable Ed Stelmach
Minister for International and Intergovernmental Relations

Attachment 1

# ALBERTA CHILDREN'S SERVICES
# EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
# AND
# CHILD CARE CONSULTATION REPORT

June 2005

**Introduction:**

Developing a long-term plan for an integrated early childhood development and child care system is important to the current and future economic and social health of Alberta. Children's early experiences have a powerful, lasting effect on their future success as individuals and their ability to contribute to society. The Alberta Government is committed to helping the province's children get the best possible start in life by supporting families and communities right from the start - through comprehensive early childhood development and child care programs and services.

Parental choice is a fundamental principle that will guide the Ministry of Children's Services' future direction for early childhood development and child care programs across the province.

The purpose of this report is to share the findings of the Ministry of Children's Services' consultation with Albertans on their child care needs, preferences and priorities.

**Setting the Context**

The federal government's proposed child care initiative commits the Government of Canada to providing $5 billion over five years to support provincial and territorial systems in early childhood development and child care. This funding includes $100m to address First Nations children's needs and priorities and an additional $100m to develop a new federal accountability package including common evidence-based indicators and benchmarks.

Alberta's share of the federal funding over the next five years is approximately $70m for 2004, $65m for 2005, and about $117m for the remaining three years.

Alberta's position has been, and continues to be, that future investments in early childhood development and child care must be based on a commitment to quality programs and services that meet the needs of all parents whether they are working, going to school or staying at home.

**Consultation Approach**

Children's Services conducted a number of consultation activities to gather input from parents, caregivers, relatives, stakeholders and the general public, including the following:

- a think tank and consultation meeting with over 100 representatives from service delivery partners, organizations, training programs, and the research sector; (See List Appendix A).
- a telephone survey with 1,600 Alberta parents of children aged 0-12 years, which collected the views of rural and urban families that reflect the province's demographics; and

- an online consultation that invited Albertans to share their thoughts on government's investment priorities in developing a plan for an integrated provincial early childhood development and child care system.

**What We Heard**

Think Tank and Consultation Sessions

The consultation sessions celebrated past successes and recognized that Alberta Children's Services has shown leadership in addressing the emerging issues in early childhood development and child care today. Sessions also demonstrated a strong commitment to find innovative solutions to the challenges ahead. Participants' comments are summarized below:

| What have we done well? | How can we improve? | What are challenges and opportunities for the future? |
|---|---|---|
| Programs and services:<br>- respond to community needs, and focus on quality, children, and an outcomes approach<br>- enable earlier identification of children at risk<br>- provide flexible planning processes to address local needs | Broaden the range of programs and services available for families particularly in rural Alberta.<br><br>Increase child care subsidy rates and income thresholds.<br><br>Improve programs and services for children exposed to family violence.<br><br>Improve knowledge of programs and services that work for Aboriginal children.<br><br>Improve awareness of available options and benefits of quality programs and services.<br><br>Improve supports to families in their role as primary caregivers.<br><br>Improve availability of inclusive child care for children with disabilities. | Providing quality programming, access and affordability are ongoing challenges for Alberta's early childhood development and child care system.<br><br>Families living in rural communities and off-reserve Aboriginal families are often the most challenged by access to existing supports and services.<br><br>Our strength as a collective to build links between programs, establish partnerships and create diverse programs. |

*"[We need] more accessibility to quality child care in rural areas"*
-parent

*"More spaces are needed in approved day homes. Right now I have my child with a private babysitter because there are no approved day homes with space available"*
parent

*"I think that day cares should be affordable for not only low income families, but also middle class families too."*
-parent

**Telephone Survey - Summary of Results**

**What are the current child care needs of Alberta's families?**
There is a slightly higher demand for all types of child care in urban *versus* rural areas. Overall, parents indicated a need for a variety of flexible, affordable child care options including:

- full-time, part-time and occasional care;
- licensed day care centres and approved family day homes;
- private babysitters, friends and family members; and
- evening, weekend and early morning care.

The majority of parents across Alberta require child care to participate in the workforce. Parents with child care needs participated in the following types of employment:

- employed full-time and part-time outside the home;
- self-employed outside the home; and
- self-employed within the home, such as home-based business and consulting.

Parents employed full or part-time indicated a greater need for child care than those who are self-employed.

There is a need for affordable child care options for children with special needs. Close to 20 per cent of parents of children with special needs reported that their current child care arrangements do not meet the special needs of their child.

Rural and urban parents of all household income levels require greater amounts of full-time care for children aged 19 months to five years than for children under 19 months and over the age of five.

Parents with children under 18 months tended to spend more each month on child care costs compared to parents with children 19 months to 12 years.

**What are the child care preferences of Alberta's families?**
Many parents prefer to have family members and private babysitters care for their children. Parents of children of all age groups frequently stated this preference.

Across the province, parents of all income levels stated that the factors that influenced their child care choices included flexible hours, a convenient location, and liking of an individual child care provider.

*"We would like a tax break so my wife could stay at home with the children"*
-parent

*"Child care costs more than what a lot of jobs pay. For single parents, it would cost more for child care than the pay they receive"*
-parent

*"I would like to be able to pay my parents for the child care they provide"*
-parent

**Are Alberta's families receiving their preferred method of child care?**

Overall, the majority of rural and urban parents across income levels access their preferred arrangements for child care. A key point relating to access to preferred child care is:

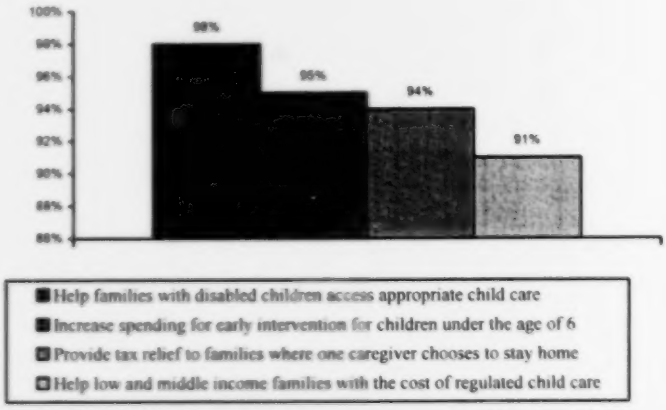
- parents with children aged 19 to 35 months have less access to their preferred child care option than parents of children under 19 months and aged three to 12 years.

Affordability of child care is an issue for households with an annual income of $79,000 or less. For families with annual incomes of $59,000 or less, affordability is a *major* issue and often determines the type of care used. Other key points relating to the affordability of child care include:

- overall, urban child care is more expensive than rural care. Urban parents pay an estimated 29 per cent more per month than rural parents;
- on average, both urban and rural families pay more for child care for children aged 19 months to five years than for children under 19 months and aged six to12; and
- parents may pay more for their preferred child care option if they can afford it. On average, higher income households pay more for child care than lower income households.

**What are the child care funding priorities of Alberta's families?**

The following table reflects the opinions of 90 per cent or more survey respondents regarding how additional child care funding should be spent:




Source: General Population Survey of Parents with Child Care Needs Report. Malatest & Associates Ltd. 2005.

*"I truly believe that there should be more programs dedicated to stay-at-home mothers."*
-parent

*"My 2 year old daughter is at an excellent for- profit day care and I am very pleased with the learning experience she is receiving; however the centre has had a number of staff changes due to low wages of staff. This is disruptive to my daughter and her ability to attach to her caregivers"*
-parent

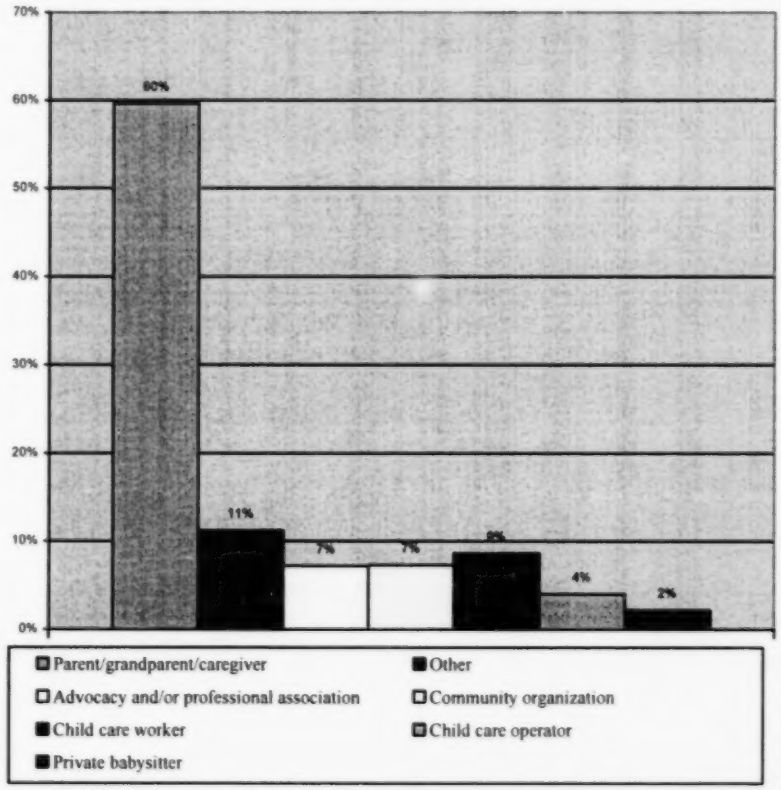
*"Subsidies for low income families is critical to ensure adequate support is in place for the child's stimulation/ learning and the opportunity for the parents to engage in educational or work experiences"*
-parent

The survey showed no significant differences in the priorities of families based on household income. Rural and urban parents stated similar priorities, however slightly fewer rural respondents stated a preference for subsidizing low income families for out-of-school and licensed child care than urban parents.

**Online Consultation - Summary of Results**

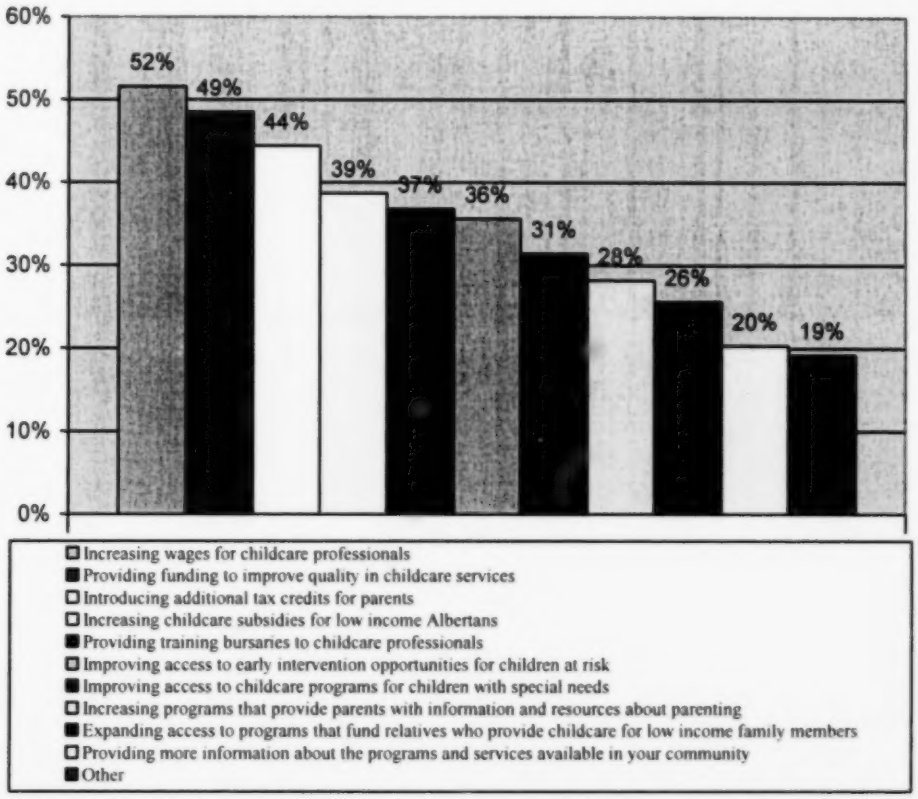
1. **Summary of Results**

Over 3,870 responses were received from Albertans who identified their views representative of one or more of the following categories:




A significant percentage of respondents (60 %) identified themselves as parents/grandparents/caregivers. While respondents could choose more that one category to self-identify, only 13 per cent identified themselves as a child care operator and/or child care worker.

## 2. Priorities for investments




Fifty - two per cent of respondents chose increasing wages for child care professionals as the top priority for possible investments. This was followed closely by 49 per cent who chose providing funding to improve quality in child care services. The third most popular priority area was introducing additional tax credits for parents (44 %).

Of the respondents who identified themselves as parent/grandparent/caregiver only, 67 per cent supported introducing additional tax credits, followed by 61 per cent support for increasing wages for child care professionals, and 59 percent for providing funding to improve quality. According to the comments provided by respondents, many parents were in favour of providing financial support for stay-at-home parents. However, parents who selected support for child care also supported tax benefits, indicating that additional tax benefits would be helpful for their situations, as well.

*"I truly believe that there should be more programs dedicated to stay-at-home mothers."*
-parent

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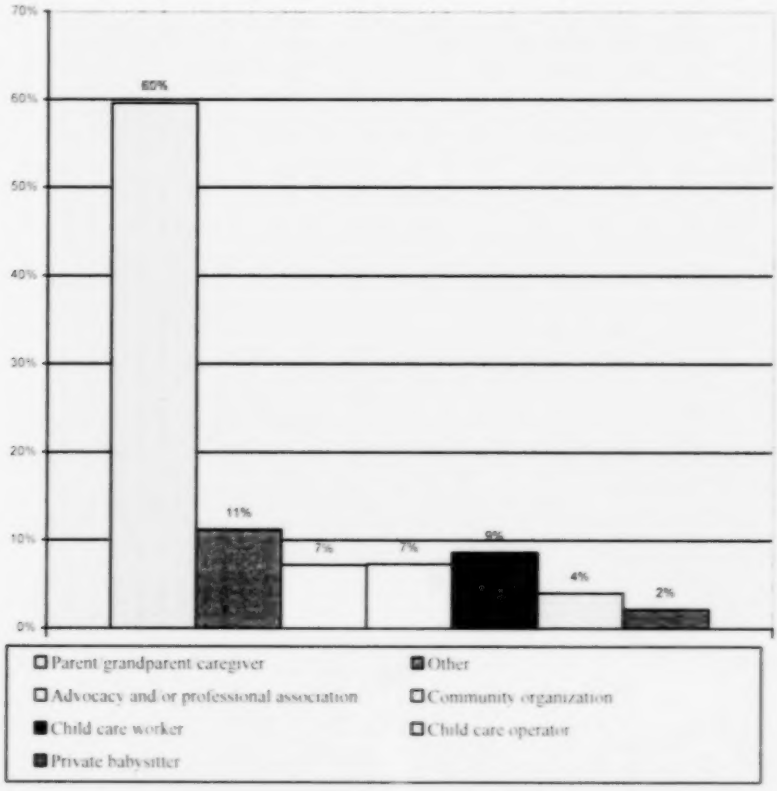


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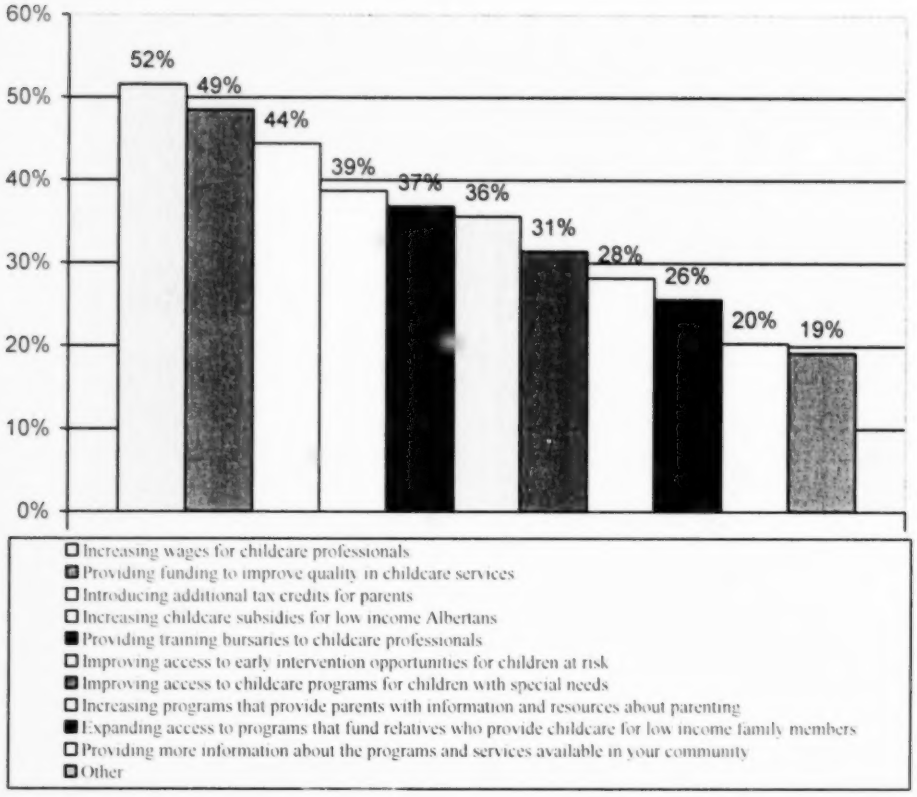


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*"My daughter or her playmates don't care who sets the agenda, only that it happens now and benefits those who need it and I thank you seeking this feedback. I appreciate the opportunity to provide it and wish you well in your future work. You have a real opportunity to make a significant difference to future generations"*
-parent

*"All parents should receive a tax break for children and then decide themselves how to allocate that money."*
-parent

In addition to priority areas, Albertans were asked to share their other ideas and recommendations for consideration. A review of these comments is summarized below:

- overall comments related to increasing subsidy for low-income families and spoke to inadequacy of current rates and income thresholds;
- a significant number of respondents emphasized their desire for support for stay-at-home parents;
- there was solid support for raising the wages of child care workers, and ensuring that they receive adequate training.;
- in addition to strong support for increasing quality, many respondents referenced accreditation, and voiced their approval of the initiative;
- many respondents addressed the issue of out-of-school care, especially the absence of subsidy for school-age children in many municipalities;
- some respondents noted the scarcity of regulated child care in their areas, and advocated for the development of new programs; and

**Conclusion**

On behalf of Alberta Children's Services, we would like to thank the many Albertans who participated in our consultation. The ideas and comments that were shared will provide a good starting point for the development of a "Made in Alberta" early childhood development and child care strategy that lays the foundation for children as leaders of tomorrow's communities.

## *APPENDIX A*

### Think Tank and Consultation Meeting Participants

- Child and Family Services Authorities
- Family and Community Support Services
- Provincial Aboriginal Co-chair Committee
- Alberta public college early childhood development programs
- Operators and directors of both non-profit and commercial child care programs
- Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services
- Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement
- Invest in Kids Foundation
- Alberta Family Support for Children with Disabilities Advisory Committee
- Alberta Child Care Network Association
- Parent Link Centres
- Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
- Provincial FSCD Parent Advisory Committee
- Aboriginal Head Start Committee